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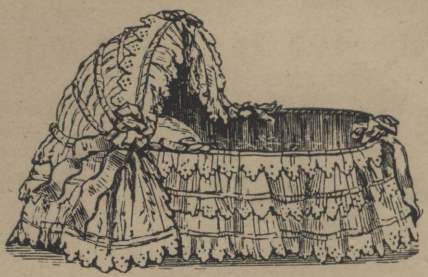
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CHAPTER XXV.

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After dinner Sir Peregrine gave a toast. 'Lady Mason, we will drink the health of the absent boys. God bless them! I hope they are enjoying themselves.'

'God bless them!' said Mrs. Orme, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

'God bless them both!' said Lady Mason, also putting her handkerchief to her eyes. Then the ladies left the room, and that was the extent of their special festivity. 'Robert,' said Sir Peregrine immediately afterwards to his butler, 'let them have what port wine they want in the servants' hall—within measure.'

'Yes, Sir Peregrine.'

'And, Robert, I shall not want you again.'

'Thank you, Sir Peregrine.'

From all which it may be imagined that the Christmas doings at the Cleeve were chiefly maintained below stairs.

'I do hope they are happy,' said Mrs. Orme, when the two ladies

prosecution might not be possible as a first proceeding, but if the estate were recovered at common law, would not the criminal prosecution follow as a matter of course? And then Mr. Furnival thought it all over again and again.

If this document were genuine—this new document which the man Dockwrath stated that he had found—this deed of separation of partnership which purported to have been executed on that 14th of July! That was now the one important question. If it were genuine! And why should there not be as strong a question of the honesty of that document as of the other? Mr. Furnival well knew that no fraudulent deed would be forged and produced without a motive; and that if he impugned this deed he must show the motive. Motive enough there was, no doubt. Mason might have had it forged in order to get the property, or Dockwrath to gratify his revenge. But in such case it would be a forgery of the present day. There could have been no motive for such a forgery twenty years ago. The paper, the writing, the attested signature of Martock, the other party to it, would prove that it had not been got up and manufactured now. Dockwrath would not dare to bring forward such a forgery as that. There was no hope of any such result.

But might not he, Furnival, if the matter were pushed before a jury, make them think that the two documents stood balanced against each other? and that Lady Mason's respectability, her long possession, together with the vile malignity of her antagonists, gave the greater probability of honesty to the disputed codicil? Mr. Furnival did think that he might induce a jury to acquit her; but he terribly feared that he might not be able to induce the world to acquit her also. As he thought of all the case, he seemed to put himself apart from the world at large. He did not question himself as to his own belief, but seemed to feel that it would suffice for him if he could so bring it about that her other friends should think her innocent. It would by no means suffice for him to secure for her son the property, and for her a simple acquittal. It was not that he dreaded the idea of thinking her guilty himself; perhaps he did so think her now—he half thought her so, at any rate; but he greatly dreaded the idea of others thinking so. It might be well to buy up Dockwrath, if it were possible. If it were possible! But then it was not possible that he himself could have a hand in such a matter. Could Crabwitz do it? No; he thought not. And then, at this moment, he was not certain that he could depend on Crabwitz.

And why should he trouble himself in this way? Mr. Furnival was a man loyal to his friends at heart. Had Lady Mason been a man, and had he pulled that man through great difficulties in early life, he would have been loyally desirous of carrying him through the same or similar difficulties at any after period. In that cause

which he had once battled he was always ready to do battle, without reference to any professional consideration of triumph or profit. It was to this feeling of loyalty that he had owed much of his success in life. And in such a case as this it may be supposed that that feeling would be strong. But then such a feeling presumed a case in which he could sympathize—in which he could believe. Would it be well that he should allow himself to feel the same interest in this case, to maintain respecting it the same personal anxiety, if he ceased to believe in it? He did ask himself the question, and he finally answered it in the affirmative. He had beaten Joseph Mason once in a good stand-up fight; and having done so, having thus made the matter his own, it was necessary to his comfort that he should beat him again, if another fight were to be fought. Lady Mason was his client, and all the associations of his life taught him to be true to her as such.

And as we are thus searching into his innermost heart we must say more than this. Mrs. Furnival perhaps had no sufficient grounds for those terrible fears of hers; but nevertheless the mistress of Orley Farm was very comely in the eyes of the lawyer. Her eyes, when full of tears, were very bright, and her hand, as it lay in his, was very soft. He laid out for himself no scheme of wickedness with reference to her; he purposely entertained no thoughts which he knew to be wrong; but, nevertheless, he did feel that he liked to have her by him, that he liked to be her adviser and friend, that he liked to wipe the tears from those eyes—not by a material handkerchief from his pocket, but by immaterial manly sympathy from his bosom; and that he liked also to feel the pressure of that hand. Mrs. Furnival had become solid, and heavy, and red; and though he himself was solid, and heavy, and red also —more so, indeed, in proportion than his poor wife, for his redness, as I have said before, had almost reached a purple hue; nevertheless his eye loved to look upon the beauty of a lovely woman, his ear loved to hear the tone of her voice, and his hand loved to meet the soft ripeness of her touch. It was very wrong that it should have been so, but the case is not without a parallel.

And therefore he made up his mind that he would not desert Lady Mason. He would not desert her; but how would he set about the fighting that would be necessary in her behalf? He was well aware of this, that if he fought at all, he must fight now. It would not do to let the matter go on till she should be summoned to defend herself. Steps which might now be available would be altogether unavailable in two or three months' time—would be so, perhaps, if he allowed two or three weeks to pass idly by him. Mr. Round, luckily, was not disposed to hurry his proceedings; nor, as far as he was concerned, was there any bitterness of antagonism. But with both Mason and Dockwrath there would be hot haste, and

hotter malice. From those who were really her enemies she could expect no quarter.

He was to return on that evening to Noningsby, and on the following day he would go over to The Cleeve. He knew that Lady Mason was staying there; but his object in making that visit would not be merely that he might see her, but also that he might speak to Sir Peregrine, and learn how far the baronet was inclined to support his neighbour in her coming tribulation. He would soon be able to ascertain what Sir Peregrine really thought—whether he suspected the possibility of any guilt; and he would ascertain also what was the general feeling in the neighbourhood of Hamworth. It would be a great thing if he could spread abroad a conviction that she was an injured woman. It would be a great thing even if he could make it known that the great people of the neighbourhood so thought. The jurymen of Alston would be mortal men; and it might be possible that they should be imbued with a favourable bias on the subject before they assembled in their box for its consideration.

He wished that he knew the truth in the matter; or rather he wished he could know whether or no she were innocent, without knowing whether or no she were guilty. The fight in his hands would be conducted on terms so much more glorious if he could feel sure of her innocence. But then if he attempted that, and she were not innocent, all might be sacrificed by the audacity of his proceedings. He could not venture that, unless he were sure of his ground. For a moment or two he thought that he would ask her the question. He said to himself that he could forgive the fault. That it had been repented ere this he did not doubt, and it would be sweet to say to her that it was very grievous, but that yet it might be forgiven. It would be sweet to feel that she was in his hands, and that he would treat her with mercy and kindness. But then a hundred other thoughts forbade him to think more of this. If she had been guilty—if she declared her guilt to him—would not restitution be necessary? In that case her son must know it, and all the world must know it. Such a confession would be incompatible with that innocence before the world which it was necessary that she should maintain. Moreover, he must be able to proclaim aloud his belief in her innocence; and how could he do that, knowing her to be guilty—knowing that she also knew that he had such knowledge? It was impossible that he should ask any such question, or admit of any such confidence.

It would be necessary, if the case did come to a trial, that she should employ some attorney. The matter must come into the barrister's hands in the usual way, through a solicitor's house, and it would be well that the person employed should have a firm faith in his client. What could he say—he, as a barrister—if the attor-

ney suggested to him that the lady might possibly be guilty? As he thought of all these things he almost dreaded the difficulties before him.

He rang the bell for Crabwitz—the peculiar bell which Crabwitz was bound to answer—having first of all gone through a little ceremony with his cheque-book. Crabwitz entered, still sulky in his demeanour, for as yet the old anger had not been appeased, and it was still a doubtful matter in the clerk's mind whether or no it might not be better for him to seek a master who would better appreciate his services. A more lucrative position it might be difficult for him to find; but money is not everything, as Crabwitz said to himself more than once.

'Crabwitz,' said Mr. Furnival, looking with a pleasant face at his clerk, 'I am leaving town this evening, and I shall be absent for the next ten days. If you like you can go away for a holiday.'

'It's rather late in the season now, sir,' said Crabwitz, gloomily, as though he were determined not to be pleased.

'It is a little late, as you say; but I really could not manage it earlier. Come, Crabwitz, you and I should not quarrel. Your work has been a little hard, but then so has mine also.'

'I fancy you like it, sir.'

'Ha! ha! Like it, indeed! But so do you like it—in its way. Come, Crabwitz, you have been an excellent servant to me; and I don't think that, on the whole, I have been a bad master to you.'

'I am making no complaint, sir.'

'But you're cross because I've kept you in town a little too long. Come, Crabwitz, you must forget all that. You have worked very hard this year past. Here is a cheque for fifty pounds. Get out of town for a fortnight or so, and amuse yourself.'

'I'm sure I'm very much obliged, sir,' said Crabwitz, putting out his hand and taking the cheque. He felt that his master had got the better of him, and he was still a little melancholy on that account. He would have valued his grievance at that moment almost more than the fifty pounds, especially as by the acceptance of it he surrendered all right to complain for some considerable time to come.

'By-the-by, Crabwitz,' said Mr. Furnival, as the clerk was about to leave the room.

'Yes, sir,' said Crabwitz.

'You have never chanced to hear of an attorney named Dockwrath, I suppose?'

'What! in London, Mr. Furnival?'

'No; I fancy he has no place of business in town. He lives I know at Hamworth.'

'It's he you mean, sir, that is meddling in this affair of Lady Mason's.'

'What! you have heard of that; have you?'

'Oh! yes, sir. It's being a good deal talked about in the profession. Messrs. Round and Crook's leading young man was up here with me the other day, and he did say a good deal about it. He's a very decent young man, considering his position, is Smart.'

'And he knows Dockwrath, does he?'

'Well, sir, I can't say that he knows much of the man; but Dockwrath has been at their place of business pretty constant of late, and he and Mr. Matthew seem thick enough together.'

'Oh! they do; do they?'

'So Smart tells me. I don't know how it is myself, sir. I don't suppose this Dockwrath is a very——'

'No, no; exactly. I dare say not. You've never seen him yourself, Crabwitz?'

'Who, sir? I, sir? No, sir, I've never set eyes on the man, sir. From all I hear it's not very likely he should come here; and I'm sure it is not at all likely that I should go to him.'

Mr. Furnival sat thinking awhile, and the clerk stood waiting opposite to him, leaning with both his hands upon the table. 'You don't know any one in the neighbourhood of Hamworth, I suppose?' Mr. Furnival said at last.

'Who, sir? I, sir? Not a soul, sir. I never was there in my life.'

'I'll tell you why I ask. I strongly suspect that that man Dockwrath is at some very foul play.' And then he told to his clerk so much of the whole story of Lady Mason and her affairs as he chose that he should know. 'It is plain enough that he may give Lady Mason a great deal of annoyance,' he ended by saying.

'There's no doubting that, sir,' said Crabwitz. 'And, to tell the truth, I believe his mind is made up to do it.'

'You don't think that anything could be done by seeing him? Of course Lady Mason has got nothing to compromise. Her son's estate is as safe as my hat; but——'

'The people at Round's think it isn't quite so safe, sir.'

'Then the people at Round's know nothing about it. But Lady Mason is so averse to legal proceedings that it would be worth her while to have matters settled. You understand?'

'Yes, sir; I understand. Would not an attorney be the best person, sir?'

'Not just at present, Crabwitz. Lady Mason is a very dear friend of mine——'

'Yes, sir; we know that,' said Crabwitz.

'If you could make any pretence for running down to Hamworth—change of air, you know, for a week or so. It's a beautiful country; just the place you like. And you might find out whether anything could be done, eh?'

Mr. Crabwitz was well aware, from the first, that he did not get fifty pounds for nothing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHY SHOULD I NOT?

A DAY or two after his conversation with Crabwitz, as described in the last chapter, Mr. Furnival was driven up to the door of Sir Peregrine Orme's house in a Hamworth fly. He had come over by train from Alston on purpose to see the baronet, whom he found seated in his library. At that very moment he was again asking himself those questions which he had before asked as he was walking up and down his own dining-room. 'Why should I not?' he said to himself,—'unless, indeed, it will make her unhappy.' And then the barrister was shown into his room, muffled up to his eyes in his winter clothing.

Sir Peregrine and Mr. Furnival were well known to each other, and had always met as friends. They had been interested on the same side in the first Orley Farm Case, and possessed a topic of sympathy in their mutual dislike to Joseph Mason of Groby Park. Sir Peregrine therefore was courteous, and when he learned the subject on which he was to be consulted he became almost more than courteous.

'Oh! yes; she's staying here, Mr. Furnival. Would you like to see her?'

'Before I leave I shall be glad to see her, Sir Peregrine; but if I am justified in regarding you as specially her friend, it may perhaps be well that I should first have some conversation with you.' Sir Peregrine in answer to this declared that Mr. Furnival certainly would be so justified; that he did regard himself as Lady Mason's special friend, and that he was ready to hear anything that the barrister might have to say to him.

Many of the points of this case have already been named so often, and will, I fear, be necessarily named so often again that I will spare the repetition when it is possible. Mr. Furnival on this occasion told Sir Peregrine—not all that he had heard, but all that he thought it necessary to tell, and soon became fully aware that in the baronet's mind there was not the slightest shadow of suspicion that Lady Mason could have been in any way to blame. He, the baronet, was thoroughly convinced that Mr. Mason was the great sinner in this matter, and that he was prepared to harass an innocent and excellent lady from motives of disappointed cupidity and

long-sustained malice, which made him seem in Sir Peregrine's eyes a being almost too vile for humanity. And of Dockwrath he thought almost as badly—only that Dockwrath was below the level of his thinking. Of Lady Mason he spoke as an excellent and beautiful woman driven to misery by unworthy persecution; and so spoke with an enthusiasm that was surprising to Mr. Furnival. It was very manifest that she would not want for friendly countenance, if friendly countenance could carry her through her difficulties.

There was no suspicion against Lady Mason in the mind of Sir Peregrine, and Mr. Furnival was careful not to arouse any such feeling. When he found that the baronet spoke of her as being altogether pure and good, he also spoke of her in the same tone; but in doing so his game was very difficult. 'Let him do his worst, Mr. Furnival,' said Sir Peregrine; 'and let her remain tranquil; that is my advice to Lady Mason. It is not possible that he can really injure her.'

'It is possible that he can do nothing—very probable that he can do nothing; but nevertheless, Sir Peregrine——'

'I would have no dealing with him or his. I would utterly disregard them. If he, or they, or any of them choose to take steps to annoy her, let her attorney manage that in the usual way. I am no lawyer myself, Mr. Furnival, but that I think is the manner in which things of this kind should be arranged. I do not know whether they have still the power of disputing the will, but if so, let them do it.'

Gradually, by very slow degrees, Mr. Furnival made Sir Peregrine understand that the legal doings now threatened were not of that nature;—that Mr. Mason did not now talk of proceeding at law for the recovery of the property, but for the punishment of his father's widow as a criminal; and at last the dreadful word 'forgery' dropped from his lips.

'Who dares to make such a charge as that?' demanded the baronet, while fire literally flashed from his eyes in his anger. And when he was told that Mr. Mason did make such a charge he called him 'a mean, unmanly dastard.' 'I do not believe that he would dare to make it against a man,' said Sir Peregrine.

But there was the fact of the charge—the fact that it had been placed in the hands of respectable attorneys, with instructions to them to press it on—and the fact also that the evidence by which that charge was to be supported possessed at any rate a *primâ facie* appearance of strength. All this it was necessary to explain to Sir Peregrine, as it would also be necessary to explain it to Lady Mason.

'Am I to understand, then, that you also think——?' began Sir Peregrine.

'You are not to understand that I think anything injurious to

the lady; but I do fear that she is in a position of much jeopardy, and that great care will be necessary.'

'Good heavens! Do you mean to say that an innocent person can under such circumstances be in danger in this country?'

'An innocent person, Sir Peregrine, may be in danger of very great annoyance, and also of very great delay in proving that innocence. Innocent people have died under the weight of such charges. We must remember that she is a woman, and therefore weaker than you or I.'

'Yes, yes; but still——. You do not say that you think she can be in any real danger?' It seemed, from the tone of the old man's voice, as though he were almost angry with Mr. Furnival for supposing that such could be the case. 'And you intend to tell her all this?' he asked.

'I fear that, as her friend, neither you nor I will be warranted in keeping her altogether in the dark. Think what her feelings would be if she were summoned before a magistrate without any preparation!'

'No magistrate would listen to such a charge,' said Sir Peregrine.

'In that he must be guided by the evidence.'

'I would sooner throw up my commission than lend myself in any way to a proceeding so iniquitous.'

This was all very well, and the existence of such a feeling showed great generosity, and perhaps also poetic chivalry on the part of Sir Peregrine Orme; but it was not the way of the world, and so Mr. Furnival was obliged to explain. Magistrates would listen to the charge—would be forced to listen to the charge,—if the evidence were apparently sound. A refusal on the part of a magistrate to do so would not be an act of friendship to Lady Mason, as Mr. Furnival endeavoured to explain. 'And you wish to see her?' Sir Peregrine asked at last.

'I think she should be told; but as she is in your house, I will, of course, do nothing in which you do not concur.' Upon which Sir Peregrine rang the bell and desired the servant to take his compliments to Lady Mason and beg her attendance in the library if it were quite convenient. 'Tell her,' said Sir Peregrine, 'that Mr. Furnival is here.'

When the message was given to her she was seated with Mrs. Orme, and at the moment she summoned strength to say that she would obey the invitation, without displaying any special emotion while the servant was in the room; but when the door was shut, her friend looked at her and saw that she was as pale as death. She was pale and her limbs quivered, and that look of agony, which now so often marked her face, was settled on her brow. Mrs. Orme had never yet seen her with such manifest signs of suffering as she wore at this instant.

'I suppose I must go to them,' she said, slowly rising from her seat; and it seemed to Mrs. Orme that she was forced to hold by the table to support herself.

'Mr. Furnival is a friend, is he not?'

'Oh, yes! a kind friend, but——'

'They shall come in here if you like it better, dear.'

'Oh, no! I will go to them. It would not do that I should seem so weak. What must you think of me to see me so?'

'I do not wonder at it, dear,' said Mrs. Orme, coming round to her; 'such cruelty would kill me. I wonder at your strength rather than your weakness.' And then she kissed her. What was there about the woman that had made all those fond of her that came near her?

Mrs. Orme walked with her across the hall, and left her only at the library door. There she pressed her hand and again kissed her, and then Lady Mason turned the handle of the door and entered the room. Mr. Furnival, when he looked at her, was startled by the pallor of her face, but nevertheless he thought that she had never looked so beautiful. 'Dear Lady Mason,' said he, 'I hope you are well.'

Sir Peregrine advanced to her and handed her over to his own arm-chair. Had she been a queen in distress she could not have been treated with more gentle deference. But she never seemed to count upon this, or in any way to assume it as her right. I should accuse her of what I regard as a sin against all good taste were I to say that she was humble in her demeanour; but there was a soft meekness about her, an air of feminine dependence, a proneness to lean and almost to cling as she leaned, which might have been felt as irresistible by any man. She was a woman to know in her deep sorrow rather than in her joy and happiness; one with whom one would love to weep rather than to rejoice. And, indeed, the present was a time with her for weeping, not for rejoicing.

Sir Peregrine looked as though he were her father as he took her hand, and the barrister immediately comforted himself with the remembrance of the baronet's great age. It was natural, too, that Lady Mason should hang on him in his own house. So Mr. Furnival contented himself at the first moment with touching her hand and hoping that she was well. She answered hardly a word to either of them, but she attempted to smile as she sat down, and murmured something about the trouble she was giving them.

'Mr. Furnival thinks it best that you should be made aware of the steps which are being taken by Mr. Mason of Groby Park,' began Sir Peregrine. 'I am no lawyer myself, and therefore of course I cannot put my advice against his.'

'I am sure that both of you will tell me for the best,' she said.

'In such a matter as this it is right that you should be guided by

him. That he is as firmly your friend as I am there can be no doubt.'

'I believe Lady Mason trusts me in that,' said the lawyer.

'Indeed I do; I would trust you both in anything,' she said.

'And there can be no doubt that he must be able to direct you for the best. I say so much at the first, because I myself so thoroughly despise that man in Yorkshire,—I am so convinced that anything which his malice may prompt him to do must be futile, that I could not myself have thought it needful to pain you by what must now be said.'

This was a dreadful commencement, but she bore it, and even was relieved by it. Indeed, no tale that Mr. Furnival could have to tell after such an exordium would be so bad as that which she had feared as the possible result of his visit. He might have come there to let her know that she was at once to be carried away—immediately to be taken to her trial—perhaps to be locked up in gaol. In her ignorance of the law she could only imagine what might or might not happen to her at any moment, and therefore the words which Sir Peregrine had spoken relieved her rather than added to her fears.

And then Mr. Furnival began his tale, and gradually put before her the facts of the matter. This he did with a choice of language and a delicacy of phraseology which were admirable, for he made her clearly understand the nature of the accusation which was brought against her without using any word which was in itself harsh in its bearing. He said nothing about fraud, or forgery, or false evidence, but he made it manifest to her that Joseph Mason had now instructed his lawyer to institute a criminal proceeding against her for having forged a codicil to her husband's will.

'I must bear it as best I may,' she said. 'May the Lord give me strength to bear it!'

'It is terrible to think of,' said Sir Peregrine; 'but nobody can doubt how it will end. You are not to suppose that Mr. Furnival intends to express any doubt as to your ultimate triumph. What we fear for you is the pain you must endure before this triumph comes.'

Ah, if that were all! As the baronet finished speaking she looked furtively into the lawyer's face to see how far the meaning of these smooth words would be supported by what she might read there. Would he also think that a final triumph did certainly await her? Sir Peregrine's real opinion was easily to be learned, either from his countenance or from his words; but it was not so with Mr. Furnival. In Mr. Furnival's face, and from Mr. Furnival's words, could be learned only that which Mr. Furnival wished to declare. He saw that glance, and fully understood it; and he knew instinctively, on the spur of the moment, that he must now either

assure her by a lie, or break down all her hopes by the truth. That final triumph was not certain to her—was very far from certain! Should he now be honest to his friend, or dishonest? One great object with him was to secure the support which Sir Peregrine could give by his weight in the county; and therefore, as Sir Peregrine was present, it was needful that he should be dishonest. Arguing thus he looked the lie, and Lady Mason derived more comfort from that look than from all Sir Peregrine's words.

And then those various details were explained to her which Mr. Furnival understood that Mr. Dockwrath had picked up. They went into that matter of the partnership deed, and questions were asked as to the man Kenneby and the woman Bolster. They might both, Lady Mason said, have been witnesses to half a dozen deeds on that same day, for aught she knew to the contrary. She had been present with Sir Joseph, as far as she could now remember, during the whole of that morning, 'in and out, Sir Peregrine, as you can understand.' Sir Peregrine said that he did understand perfectly. She did know that Mr. Usbech had been there for many hours that day, probably from ten to two or three, and no doubt therefore much business was transacted. She herself remembered nothing but the affair of the will; but then that was natural, seeing that there was no other affair in which she had specially interested herself.

'No doubt these people did witness both the deeds,' said Sir Peregrine. 'For myself, I cannot conceive how that wretched man can be so silly as to spend his money on such a case as this.'

'He would do anything for revenge,' said Mr. Furnival.

And then Lady Mason was allowed to go back to the drawing-room, and what remained to be said was said between the two gentlemen alone. Sir Peregrine was very anxious that his own attorneys should be employed, and he named Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, than whom there were no more respectable men in the whole profession. But then Mr. Furnival feared that they were too respectable. They might look at the matter in so straightforward a light as to fancy their client really guilty; and what might happen then? Old Slow would not conceal the truth for all the baronets in England—no, nor for all the pretty women. The touch of Lady Mason's hand and the tear in her eye would be nothing to old Slow. Mr. Furnival, therefore, was obliged to explain that Slow and Bideawhile did not undertake that sort of business.

'But I should wish it to be taken up through them. There must be some expenditure, Mr. Furnival, and I should prefer that they should arrange about that.'

Mr. Furnival made no further immediate objection, and consented at last to having an interview with one of the firm on the subject,

provided, of course, that that member of the firm came to him at his chambers. And then he took his leave. Nothing positive had been done, or even settled to be done, on this morning; but the persons most interested in the matter had been made to understand that the affair was taking an absolute palpable substance, and that steps must be taken—indeed, would be taken almost immediately. Mr. Furnival, as he left the house, resolved to employ the attorneys whom he might think best adapted for the purpose. He would settle that matter with Slow and Bideawhile afterwards.

And then, as he returned to Noningsby, he wondered at his persistence in the matter. He believed that his client had been guilty; he believed that this codicil was no real instrument made by Sir Joseph Mason. And so believing, would it not be better for him to wash his hands of the whole affair? Others did not think so, and would it not be better that such others should be her advisers? Was he not taking up for himself endless trouble and annoyance that could have no useful purpose? So he argued with himself, and yet by the time that he had reached Noningsby he had determined that he would stand by Lady Mason to the last. He hated that man Mason, as he declared to himself when providing himself with reasons for his resolve, and regarded his bitter, malicious justice as more criminal than any crime of which Lady Mason might have been guilty. And then as he leaned back in the railway carriage he still saw her pale face before him, still heard the soft tone of her voice, and was still melted by the tear in her eye. Young man, young friend of mine, who art now filled to the overflowing of thy brain with poetry, with chivalry, and love, thou seest seated opposite to thee there that grim old man, with long snuffy nose, with sharp piercing eyes, with scanty frizzled hairs. He is rich and cross, has been three times married, and has often quarrelled with his children. He is fond of his wine, and snores dreadfully after dinner. To thy seeming he is a dry, withered stick, from which all the sap of sentiment has been squeezed by the rubbing and friction of years. Poetry, the feeling if not the words of poetry,—is he not dead to it, even as the pavement is dead over which his wheels trundle? Oh, my young friend! thou art ignorant in this—as in most other things. He may not twitter of sentiment, as thou doest; nor may I trundle my hoop along the high road as do the little boys. The fitness of things forbids it. But that old man's heart is as soft as thine, if thou couldst but read it. The body dries up and withers away, and the bones grow old; the brain, too, becomes decrepit, as do the sight, the hearing, and the soul. But the heart that is tender once remains tender to the last.

Lady Mason, when she left the library, walked across the hall towards the drawing-room, and then she paused. She would fain remain alone for a while if it were possible, and therefore she

turned aside into a small breakfast parlour, which was used every morning, but which was rarely visited afterwards during the day. Here she sat, leaving the door slightly open, so that she might know when Mr. Furnival left the baronet. Here she sat for a full hour, waiting—waiting—waiting. There was no sofa or lounging-chair in the room, reclining in which she could remain there half sleeping, sitting comfortably at her ease; but she placed herself near the table, and leaning there with her face upon her hand, she waited patiently till Mr. Furnival had gone. That her mind was full of thoughts I need hardly say, but yet the hour seemed very long to her. At last she heard the library door open, she heard Sir Peregrine's voice as he stood in the hall and shook hands with his departing visitor, she heard the sound of the wheels as the fly moved upon the gravel, and then she heard Sir Peregrine again shut the library door behind him.

She did not immediately get up from her chair; she still waited awhile, perhaps for another period of ten minutes, and then she noiselessly left the room, and moving quickly and silently across the hall she knocked at Sir Peregrine's door. This she did so gently that at first no answer was made to her. Then she knocked again, hardly louder but with a repeated rap, and Sir Peregrine summoned her to come in. 'May I trouble you once more—for one moment?' she said.

'Certainly, certainly; it is no trouble. I am glad that you are here in the house at this time, that you may see me at any moment that you may wish.'

'I do not know why you should be so good to me.'

'Because you are in great grief, in undeserved grief, because——. Lady Mason, my services are at your command. I will act for you as I would for a—daughter.'

'You hear now of what it is that they accuse me.'

'Yes,' he said; 'I do hear:' and as he spoke he came round so that he was standing near to her, but with his back to the fire-place. 'I do hear, and I blush to think that there is a man in England, holding the position of a county magistrate, who can so forget all that is due to honesty, to humanity, and to self-respect.'

'You do not then think that I have been guilty of this thing?'

'Guilty—I think you guilty! No, nor does he think so. It is impossible that he should think so. I am no more sure of my own innocence than of yours;' and as he spoke he took both her hands and looked into her face, and his eyes also were full of tears. 'You may be sure of this, that neither I nor Edith will ever think you guilty.'

'Dearest Edith,' she said; she had never before called Sir Peregrine's daughter-in-law by her Christian name, and as she now did so she almost felt that she had sinned. But Sir Peregrine took

it in good part. 'She is dearest,' he said; 'and be sure of this, that she will be true to you through it all.'

And so they stood for a while without further speech. He still held both her hands, and the tears still stood in his eyes. Her eyes were turned to the ground, and from them the tears were running fast. At first they ran silently, without audible sobbing, and Sir Peregrine, with his own old eyes full of salt water, hardly knew that she was weeping. But gradually the drops fell upon his hand, one by one at first, and then faster and faster; and soon there came a low sob, a sob all but suppressed, but which at last forced itself forth, and then her head fell upon his shoulder. 'My dear,' he said, himself hardly able to speak; 'my poor dear, my ill-used dear!' and as she withdrew one hand from his, that she might press a handkerchief to her face, his vacant arm passed itself round her waist. 'My poor, ill-used dear!' he said again, as he pressed her to his old heart, and leaning over her he kissed her lips.

So she stood for some few seconds, feeling that she was pressed close by the feeble pressure of his arm, and then she gradually sank through from his embrace, and fell upon her knees at his feet. She knelt at his feet, supporting herself with one arm upon the table, and with the other hand she still held his hand over which her head was bowed. 'My friend,' she said, still sobbing, and sobbing loudly now; 'my friend, that God has sent me in my trouble.' And then, with words that were wholly inaudible, she murmured some prayer on his behalf.

'I am better now,' she said, raising herself quickly to her feet when a few seconds had passed. 'I am better now,' and she stood erect before him. 'By God's mercy I will endure it; I think I can endure it now.'

'If I can lighten the load—'

'You have lightened it—of half its weight; but, Sir Peregine, I will leave this—'

'Leave this! go away from The Cleeve!'

'Yes; I will not destroy the comfort of your home by the wretchedness of my position. I will not—'

'Lady Mason, my house is altogether at your service. If you will be led by me in this matter, you will not leave it till this cloud shall have passed by you. You will be better to be alone now;' and then before she could answer him further, he led her to the door. She felt that it was better for her to be alone, and she hastened up the stairs to her own chamber.

'And why should I not?' said Sir Peregrine to himself, as he again walked the length of the library.

CHAPTER XXVII

COMMERCE.

Lucius Mason was still staying at Noningsby when Mr. Furnival made his visit to Sir Peregrine, and on that afternoon he received a note from his mother. Indeed, there were three notes passed between them on that afternoon, for he wrote an answer to his mother, and then received a reply to that answer. Lady Mason told him that she did not intend to return home to the Farm quite immediately, and explained that her reason for not doing so was the necessity that she should have assistance and advice at this period of her trouble. She did not say that she misdoubted the wisdom of her son's counsels; but it appeared to him that she intended to signify to him that she did so, and he answered her in words that were sore and almost bitter. 'I am sorry,' he said, 'that you and I cannot agree about a matter that is of such vital concern to both of us; but as it is so, we can only act as each thinks best, you for yourself and I for myself. I am sure, however, that you will believe that my only object is your happiness and your fair name, which is dearer to me than anything else in the world.' In answer to this, she had written again immediately, filling her letter with sweet words of motherly love, telling him that she was sure, quite sure, of his affection and kind spirit, and excusing herself for not putting the matter altogether in his hands by saying that she was forced to lean on those who had supported her from the beginning—through that former trial which had taken place when he, Lucius, was yet a baby. 'And, dearest Lucius, you must not be angry with me,' she went on to say; 'I am suffering much under this cruel persecution, but my sufferings would be more than doubled if my own boy quarrelled with me.' Lucius, when he received this, flung up his head. 'Quarrel with her,' he said to himself; 'nothing on earth would make me quarrel with her; but I cannot say that that is right which I think to be wrong.' His feelings were good and honest, and kindly too in their way; but tenderness of heart was not his weakness. I should wrong him if I were to say that he was hard-hearted, but he flattered himself that he was just-hearted, which sometimes is nearly the same—as had been the case with his father before him, and was now the case with his half-brother Joseph.

The day after this was his last at Noningsby. He had told Lady Staveley that he intended to go, and though she had pressed his further stay, remarking that none of the young people intended to move till after twelfth-night, nevertheless he persisted. With the young people of the house themselves he had not much advanced himself; and altogether he did not find himself thoroughly happy in the judge's house. They were more thoughtless than he—as he thought; they did not understand him, and therefore he would leave them. Besides, there was a great day of hunting coming on, at which everybody was to take a part, and as he did not hunt that gave him another reason for going. 'They have nothing to do but amuse themselves,' he said to himself; 'but I have a man's work before me, and a man's misfortunes. I will go home and face both.'

In all this there was much of conceit, much of pride, much of deficient education—deficiency in that special branch of education which England has imparted to the best of her sons, but which is now becoming out of fashion. He had never learned to measure himself against others,—I do not mean his knowledge or his book-acquirements, but the every-day conduct of his life,—and to perceive that that which is insignificant in others must be insignificant in himself also. To those around him at Noningsby his extensive reading respecting the Iapetidæ recommended him not at all, nor did his agricultural ambitions;—not even to Felix Graham, as a companion, though Felix Graham could see further into his character than did the others. He was not such as they were. He had not the unpretentious, self-controlling humour, perfectly free from all conceit, which was common to them. Life did not come easy to him, and the effort which he was ever making was always visible. All men should ever be making efforts, no doubt; but those efforts should not be conspicuous. But yet Lucius Mason was not a bad fellow, and young Staveley showed much want of discernment when he called him empty-headed and selfish. Those epithets were by no means applicable to him. That he was not empty-headed is certain; and he was moreover capable of a great self-sacrifice.

That his talents and good qualities were appreciated by one person in the house, seemed evident to Lady Staveley and the other married ladies of the party. Miss Furnival, as they all thought, had not found him empty-headed. And, indeed, it may be doubted whether Lady Staveley would have pressed his stay at Noningsby, had Miss Furnival been less gracious. Dear Lady Staveley was always living in a fever lest her only son, the light of her eyes, should fall irrevocably in love with some lady that was by no means good enough for him. Revocably in love he was daily falling; but some day he would go too deep, and the waters would close over his well-loved head. Now in her dear old favouring eyes Sophia Furnival was by

no means good enough, and it had been quite clear that Augustus had become thoroughly lost in his attempts to bring about a match between Felix Graham and the barrister's daughter. In preparing the bath for his friend he had himself fallen bodily into the water. He was always at Miss Furnival's side, as long as Miss Furnival would permit it. But it seemed to Lady Staveley that Miss Furnival, luckily, was quite as fond of having Lucius Mason at her side;—that of the two she perhaps preferred Lucius Mason. That her taste and judgment should be so bad was wonderful to Lady Staveley; but this depravity though wonderful was useful; and therefore Lucius Mason might have been welcome to remain at Noningsby.

It may, however, be possible that Miss Furnival knew what she was doing quite as well as Lady Staveley could know for her. In the first place she may possibly have thought it indiscreet to admit Mr. Staveley's attentions with too much freedom. She may have doubted their sincerity, or feared to give offence to the family, or Mr. Mason may in her sight have been the preferable suitor. That his gifts of intellect were at any rate equal to those of the other there can be no doubt. Then his gifts of fortune were already his own, and, for ought that Miss Furnival knew, might be equal to any that would ever appertain to the other gentleman. That Lady Staveley should think her swan better looking than Lady Mason's goose was very natural; but then Lady Mason would no doubt have regarded the two birds in an exactly opposite light. It is only fair to conceive that Miss Furnival was a better judge than either of them.

On the evening before his departure the whole party had been playing commerce; for the rule of the house during these holidays was this, that all the amusements brought into vogue were to be adapted to the children. If the grown-up people could adapt themselves to them, so much the better for them; if not, so much the worse; they must in such case provide for themselves. On the whole, the grown-up people seemed to live nearly as jovial a life as did the children. Whether the judge himself was specially fond of commerce I cannot say; but he persisted in putting in the whole pool, and played through the entire game, rigidly fighting for the same pool on behalf of a very small grandchild, who sat during the whole time on his knee. There are those who call cards the devil's books, but we will presume that the judge was of a different way of thinking.

On this special evening Sophia had been sitting next to Augustus,—a young man can always arrange these matters in his own house,—but had nevertheless lost all her lives early in the game. 'I will not have any cheating to-night,' she had said to her neighbour; 'I will take my chance, and if I die, I die. One can die but once.' And so she had died, three times indeed instead of once only, and

had left the table. Lucius Mason also had died. He generally did die the first, having no aptitude for a collection of kings or aces, and so they two came together over the fire in the second drawing-room, far away from the card-players. There was nothing at all remarkable in this, as Mr. Furnival and one or two others who did not play commerce were also there; but nevertheless they were separated from those of the party who were most inclined to criticise their conduct.

'So you are leaving to-morrow, Mr. Mason,' said Sophia.

'Yes. I go home to-morrow after breakfast; to my own house, where for some weeks to come I shall be absolutely alone.'

'Your mother is staying at The Cleeve, I think.'

'Yes,—and intends remaining there as she tells me. I wish with all my heart she were at Orley Farm.'

'Papa saw her yesterday. He went over to The Cleeve on purpose to see her; and this morning he has been talking to me about her. I cannot tell you how I grieve for her.'

'It is very sad; very sad. But I wish she were in her own house. Under the circumstances as they now are, I think it would be better for her to be there than elsewhere. Her name has been disgraced—'

'No, Mr. Mason; not disgraced.'

'Yes; disgraced. Mark you; I do not say that she has been disgraced; and pray do not suppose it possible that I should think so. But a great opprobrium has been thrown on her name, and it would be better, I think, that she should remain at home till she has cast it off from her. Even for myself, I feel it almost wrong to be here; nor would I have come had I known when I did come as much as I do know now.'

'But no one can for a moment think that your mother has done anything that she should not have done.'

'Then why do so many people talk of her as though she had committed a great crime? Miss Furnival, I know that she is innocent. I know it as surely as I know the fact of my own existence—'

'And we all feel the same thing.'

'But if you were in my place,—if it were your father whose name was so bandied about in people's mouths, you would think that it behoved him to do nothing, to go nowhere, till he had forced the world to confess his innocence. And this is ten times stronger with regard to a woman. I have given my mother my counsel, and I regret to say that she differs from me.'

'Why do you not speak to papa?'

'I did once. I went to him at his chambers, and he rebuked me.'

'Rebuked you, Mr. Mason! He did not do that intentionally I am sure. I have heard him say that you are an excellent son.'

'But nevertheless he did rebuke me. He considered that I was travelling beyond my own concerns, in wishing to interfere for the protection of my mother's name. He said that I should leave it to such people as the Staveleys and the Ormes to guard her from ignominy and disgrace.'

'Oh, he did not mean that!'

'But to me it seems that it should be a son's first duty. They are talking of trouble and of cost. I would give every hour I have in the day, and every shilling I own in the world to save her from one week of such suffering as she now endures; but it cuts me to the heart when she tells me that because she is suffering, therefore she must separate herself from me. I think it would be better for her, Miss Furnival, to be staying at home with me, than to be at The Cleeve.'

'The kindness of Mrs. Orme must be a great support to her.'

'And why should not my kindness be a support to her,—or rather my affection? We know from whom all these scandals come. My desire is to meet that man in a court of law and thrust these falsehoods down his throat.'

'Ah! but you are a man.'

'And therefore I would take the burden from her shoulders. But no; she will not trust to me. The truth, Miss Furnival, is this, that she has not yet learned to think of me as a man. To her I am still the boy for whom she is bound to provide, not the son who should bear for her all her cares. As it is I feel that I do not dare again to trouble her with my advice.'

'Grandmamma is dead,' shouted out a shrill small voice from the card-table. 'Oh, grandmamma, do have one of my lives. Look! I've got three,' said another.

'Thank you, my dears; but the natural term of my existence has come, and I will not rebel against fate.'

'Oh, grandmamma,—we'll let you have another grace.'

'By no means, Charley. Indeed I am not clear that I am entitled to Christian burial, as it is.'

'A case of felo de se, I rather think,' said her son. 'About this time of the night suicide does become common among the elders. Unfortunately for me, the pistol that I have been snapping at my own head for the last half-hour always hangs fire.'

There was not much of love-making in the conversation which had taken place between young Mason and Sophia; not much at least up to this point; but a confidence had been established, and before he left her he did say a word or two that was more tender in its nature. 'You must not be in dudgeon with me,' he said, 'for speaking to you of all this. Hitherto I have kept it all to myself, and perhaps I should still have done so.'

'Oh no; do not say that.'

'I am in great grief. It is dreadful to me to hear these things said, and as yet I have found no sympathy.'

'I can assure you, Mr. Mason, that I do sympathize with you most sincerely. I only wish my sympathy could be of more value.'

'It will be invaluable,' he said, not looking at her, but fixing his eyes upon the fire, 'if it be given with constancy from the first to the last of this sad affair.'

'It shall be so given,' said Miss Furnival, also looking at the fire.

'It will be tolerably long, and men will say cruel things of us. I can foresee this, that it will be very hard to prove to the world with certainty that there is no foundation whatever for these charges. If those who are now most friendly to us turn away from us—'

'I will never turn away from you, Mr. Mason.'

'Then give me your hand on that, and remember that such a promise in my ears means much.' He in his excitement had forgotten that there were others in the room who might be looking at them, and that there was a long vista open upon them direct from all the eyes at the card-table; but she did not forget it. Miss Furnival could be very enthusiastic, but she was one of those who in her enthusiasm rarely forgot anything. Nevertheless, after a moment's pause, she gave him her hand. 'There it is,' she said; 'and you may be sure of this, that with me also such a promise does mean something. And now I will say good night.' And so, having received the pressure of her hand, she left him.

'I will get you your candle,' he said, and so he did.

'Good night, papa,' she said, kissing her father. And then, with a slight muttered word to Lady Staveley, she withdrew, having sacrificed the remainder of that evening for the sake of acceding to Mr. Mason's request respecting her pledge. It could not be accounted strange that she should give her hand to the gentleman with whom she was immediately talking as she bade him good night.

'And now grandpapa is dead too,' said Marian, 'and there's nobody left but us three.'

'And we'll divide,' said Fanny Sebright; and so the game of commerce was brought to an end.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MONKTON GRANGE.

During these days Peregrine Orme—though he was in love up to his very chin, seriously in love, acknowledging this matter to himself openly, pulling his hair in the retirement of his bedroom, and resolving that he would do that which he had hitherto in life always been successful in doing—ask, namely, boldly for that he wanted sorely—Peregrine Orme, I say, though he was in this condition, did not in these days neglect his hunting. A proper attendance upon the proceedings of the H. H. was the only duty which he had hitherto undertaken in return for all that his grandfather had done for him, and I have no doubt that he conceived that he was doing a duty in going hither and thither about the county to their most distant meets. At this period of the present season it happened that Noningsby was more central to the proceedings of the hunt than The Cleeve, and therefore he was enabled to think that he was remaining away from home chiefly on business. On one point, however, he had stoutly come to a resolution. That question should be asked of Madeline Staveley before he returned to his grandfather's house.

And now had arrived a special hunting morning—special, because the meet was in some degree a show meet, appropriate for ladies, at a comfortable distance from Noningsby, and affording a chance of amusement to those who sat in carriages as well as to those on horseback. Monkton Grange was the well-known name of the place, a name perhaps dearer to the ladies than to the gentlemen of the country, seeing that show meets do not always give the best sport. Monkton Grange is an old farm-house, now hardly used as such, having been left, as regards the habitation, in the hands of a head labourer; but it still possesses the marks of ancient respectability and even of grandeur. It is approached from the high road by a long double avenue of elms, which still stand in all their glory. The road itself has become narrow, and the space between the side row of trees is covered by soft turf, up which those coming to the meet love to gallop, trying the fresh metal of their horses. And the old house itself is surrounded by a moat, dry indeed now for the most part, but nevertheless an evident moat, deep and well preserved, with a bridge over it which Fancy tells us must once

have been a drawbridge. It is here, in front of the bridge, that the old hounds sit upon their haunches, resting quietly round the horses of the huntsmen, while the young dogs move about, and would wander if the whips allowed them—one of the fairest sights to my eyes that this fair country of ours can show. And here the sportsmen and ladies congregate by degrees, men from a distance in dog-carts generally arriving first, as being less able to calculate the time with accuracy. There is room here too in the open space for carriages, and there is one spot on which always stands old Lord Alston's chariot with the four posters; an ancient sportsman he, who still comes to some few favourite meets; and though Alston Court is but eight miles from the Grange, the post-horses always look as though they had been made to do their best, for his lordship likes to move fast even in his old age. He is a tall thin man, bent much with age, and apparently too weak for much walking; he is dressed from head to foot in a sportsman's garb, with a broad stiffly starched coloured handkerchief tied rigidly round his neck. One would say that old as he is he has sacrificed in no way to comfort. It is with difficulty that he gets into his saddle, his servant holding his rein and stirrup and giving him perhaps some other slight assistance; but when he is there, there he will remain all day, and when his old blood warms he will gallop along the road with as much hot fervour as his grandson. An old friend he of Sir Peregrine's. 'And why is not your grandfather here to-day?' he said on this occasion to young Orme. 'Tell him from me that if he fails us in this way, I shall think he is getting old.' Lord Alston was in truth five years older than Sir Peregrine, but Sir Peregrine at this time was thinking of other things.

And then a very tidy little modern carriage bustled up the road, a brougham made for a pair of horses, which was well known to all hunting men in these parts. It was very unpretending in its colour and harness; but no vehicle more appropriate to its purpose ever carried two thorough-going sportsmen day after day about the country. In this as it pulled up under the head tree of the avenue were seated the two Miss Tristrams. The two Miss Tristrams were well known to the Hamworth Hunt—I will not merely say as fearless riders,—of most girls who hunt as much can be said as that; but they were judicious horsewomen; they knew when to ride hard, and when hard riding, as regarded any necessary for the hunt, would be absolutely thrown away. They might be seen for half the day moving about the roads as leisurely, or standing as quietly at the covert's side as might the seniors of the field. But when the time for riding did come, when the hounds were really running—when other young ladies had begun to go home—then the Miss Tristrams were always there;—there or thereabouts, as their admirers would warmly boast.

Nor did they commence their day's work as did other girls who came out on hunting mornings. With most such it is clear to see that the object is pretty much the same here as in the ballroom. 'Spectatum veniunt; veniunt spectentur ut ipsæ,' as it is proper, natural, and desirable that they should do. By that word 'spectatum' I would wish to signify something more than the mere use of the eyes. Perhaps an occasional word dropped here and there into the ears of a cavalier may be included in it; and the 'spectentur' also may include a word so received. But the Miss Tristrams came for hunting. Perhaps there might be a slight shade of affectation in the manner by which they would appear to come for that and that only. They would talk of nothing else, at any rate during the earlier portion of the day, when many listeners were by. They were also well instructed as to the country to be drawn, and usually had a word of import to say to the huntsman. They were good-looking, fair-haired girls, short in size, with bright gray eyes, and a short decisive mode of speaking. It must not be imagined that they were altogether indifferent to such matters as are dear to the hearts of other girls. They were not careless as to admiration, and if report spoke truth of them were willing enough to establish themselves in the world; but all their doings of that kind had a reference to their favourite amusement, and they would as soon have thought of flirting with men who did not hunt as some other girls would with men who did not dance.

I do not know that this kind of life had been altogether successful with them, or that their father had been right to permit it. He himself had formerly been a hunting man, but he had become fat and lazy, and the thing had dropped away from him. Occasionally he did come out with them, and when he did not do so some other senior of the field would have them nominally under charge; but practically they were as independent when going across the country as the young men who accompanied them. I have expressed a doubt whether this life was successful with them, and indeed such doubt was expressed by many of their neighbours. It had been said of each of them for the last three years that she was engaged, now to this man, and then to that other; but neither this man nor that other had yet made good the assertion, and now people were beginning to say that no man was engaged to either of them. Hunting young ladies are very popular in the hunting-field; I know no place in which girls receive more worship and attention; but I am not sure but they may carry their enthusiasm too far for their own interests, let their horsemanship be as perfect as it may be.

The two girls on this occasion sat in their carriage till the groom brought up their horses, and then it was wonderful to see with what ease they placed themselves in their saddles. On such occasions they admitted no aid from the gentlemen around them, but each

stepping for an instant on a servant's hand, settled herself in a moment on horseback. Nothing could be more perfect than the whole thing, but the wonder was that Mr. Tristram should have allowed it.

The party from Noningsby consisted of six or seven on horseback, besides those in the carriage. Among the former there were the two young ladies, Miss Furnival and Miss Staveley, and our friends Felix Graham, Augustus Staveley, and Peregrine Orme. Felix Graham was not by custom a hunting man, as he possessed neither time nor money for such a pursuit; but to-day he was mounted on his friend Staveley's second horse, having expressed his determination to ride him as long as they two, the man and the horse, could remain together.

'I give you fair warning,' Felix had said, 'if I do not spare my own neck, you cannot expect me to spare your horse's legs.'

'You may do your worst,' Staveley had answered. 'If you give him his head, and let him have his own way, he won't come to grief, whatever you may do.'

On their road to Monkton Grange, which was but three miles from Noningsby, Peregrine Orme had ridden by the side of Miss Staveley, thinking more of her than of the affairs of the hunt, prominent as they were generally in his thoughts. How should he do it, and when, and in what way should he commence the deed? He had an idea that it might be better for him if he could engender some closer intimacy between himself and Madeline before he absolutely asked the fatal question; but the closer intimacy did not seem to produce itself readily. He had, in truth, known Madeline Staveley for many years, almost since they were children together; but lately, during these Christmas holidays especially, there had not been between them that close conversational alliance which so often facilitates such an overture as that which Peregrine was now desirous of making. And, worse again, he had seen that there was such close conversational alliance between Madeline and Felix Graham. He did not on that account dislike the young barrister, or call him, even within his own breast, a snob or an ass. He knew well that he was neither the one nor the other; but he knew as well that he could be no fit match for Miss Staveley, and, to tell the truth, he did not suspect that either Graham or Miss Staveley would think of such a thing. It was not jealousy that tormented him, so much as a diffidence in his own resources. He made small attempts which did not succeed, and therefore he determined that he would at once make a grand attempt. He would create himself an opportunity before he left Noningsby, and would do it even to-day on horseback, if he could find sufficient opportunity. In taking a determined step like that, he knew that he would not lack the courage.

'Do you mean to ride to-day,' he said to Madeline, as they were approaching the bottom of the Grange avenue. For the last half-mile he had been thinking what he would say to her, and thinking in vain; and now, at the last moment, he could summon no words to his assistance more potent for his purpose than these.

'If you mean by riding, Mr. Orme, going across the fields with you and the Miss Tristrams, certainly not. I should come to grief, as you call it, at the first ditch.'

'And that is just what I shall do,' said Felix Graham, who was at her other side.

'Then, if you take my advice, you'll remain with us in the wood, and act as squire of dames. What on earth would Marian do if aught but good was to befall you?'

'Dear Marian! She gave me a special commission to bring her the fox's tail. Foxes' tails are just like ladies.'

'Thank you, Mr. Graham. I've heard you make some pretty compliments, and that is about the prettiest.'

'A faint heart will never win either the one or the other, Miss Staveley.'

'Oh, ah, yes. That will do very well. Under these circumstances I will accept the comparison.'

All of which very innocent conversation was overheard by Peregrine Orme, riding on the other side of Miss Staveley's horse. And why not? Neither Graham nor Miss Staveley had any objection. But how was it that he could not join in and take his share in it? He had made one little attempt at conversation, and that having failed he remained perfectly silent till they reached the large circle at the head of the avenue. 'It's no use, this sort of thing,' he said to himself. 'I must do it at a blow, if I do it at all;' and then he rode away to the master of the hounds.

As our party arrived at the open space the Miss Tristrams were stepping out of their carriage, and they came up to shake hands with Miss Staveley.

'I am so glad to see you,' said the eldest; 'it is so nice to have some ladies out besides ourselves.'

'Do keep up with us,' said the second. 'It's a very open country about here, and anybody can ride it.' And then Miss Furnival was introduced to them. 'Does your horse jump, Miss Furnival?'

'I really do not know,' said Sophia; 'but I sincerely trust that if he does, he will refrain to-day.'

'Don't say so,' said the eldest sportswoman. 'If you'll only begin it will come as easy to you as going along the road;' and then, not being able to spare more of these idle moments, they both went off to their horses, walking as though their habits were no impediments to them, and in half a minute they were seated.

'What is Harriet on to-day?' asked Staveley of a constant member of the hunt. Now Harriet was the eldest Miss Tristram.

'A little brown mare she got last week. That was a terrible brush we had on Friday. You weren't out, I think. We killed in the open, just at the edge of Rotherham Common. Harriet was one of the few that was up, and I don't think the chestnut horse will be the better of it this season.'

'That was the horse she got from Griggs?'

'Yes; she gave a hundred and fifty for him; and I'm told he was as nearly done on Friday as any animal you ever put your eyes on. They say Harriet cried when she got home.' Now the gentleman who was talking about Harriet on this occasion was one with whom she would no more have sat down to table than with her own groom.

But though Harriet may have cried when she got home on that fatal Friday evening, she was full of the triumph of the hunt on this morning. It is not often that the hounds run into a fox and absolutely surround and kill him on the open ground, and when this is done after a severe run there are seldom many there to see it. If a man can fairly take a fox's brush on such an occasion as that, let him do it; otherwise let him leave it to the huntsman. On the occasion in question it seems that Harriet Tristram might have done so, and some one coming second to her had been gallant enough to do it for her.

'Oh, my lord, you should have been out on Friday,' she said to Lord Alston. 'We had the prettiest thing I ever saw.'

'A great deal too pretty for me, my dear.'

'Oh, you who know the roads so well would certainly have been up. I suppose it was thirteen miles from Cobbleton's Bushes to Rotherham Common.'

'Not much less, indeed,' said his lordship, unwilling to diminish the lady's triumph. Had a gentleman made the boast his lordship would have demonstrated that it was hardly more than eleven.

'I timed it accurately from the moment he went away,' said the lady, 'and it was exactly fifty-seven minutes. The first part of it was awfully fast. Then we had a little check at Moseley Bottom. But for that, nobody could have lived through it. I never shall forget how deep it was coming up from there to Cringleton. I saw two men get off to ease their horses up the deep bit of plough; and I would have done so too, only my horse would not have stood for me to get up.'

'I hope he was none the worse for it,' said the sporting character who had been telling Staveley just now how she had cried when she got home that night.

'To tell the truth, I fear it has done him no good. He would not feed, you know, that night at all.'

'And broke out into cold sweats,' said the gentleman.

'Exactly,' said the lady, not quite liking it, but still enduring with patience.

'Rather groggy on his pins the next morning?' suggested her friend.

'Very groggy,' said Harriet, regarding the word as one belonging to fair sporting phraseology.

'And inclined to go very much on the points of his toes. I know all about it, Miss Tristram, as well as though I'd seen him.'

'There's nothing but rest for it, I suppose.'

'Rest and regular exercise—that's the chief thing; and I should give him a mash as often as three times a week. He'll be all right again in three or four weeks,—that is if he's sound, you know.'

'Oh, as sound as a bell,' said Miss Tristram.

'He'll never be the same horse on a road though,' said the sporting gentlemen, shaking his head and whispering to Staveley.

And now the time had come at which they were to move. They always met at eleven; and at ten minutes past, to the moment, Jacob the huntsman would summons the old hounds from off their haunches. 'I believe we may be moving, Jacob,' said Mr. Williams, the master.

'The time be up,' said Jacob, looking at a ponderous timekeeper that might with truth be called a hunting-watch; and then they all moved slowly away back from the Grange, down a farm-road which led to Monkton Wood, distant from the old house perhaps a quarter of a mile.

'May we go as far as the wood?' said Miss Furnival to Augustus. 'Without being made to ride over hedges, I mean.'

'Oh, dear, yes; and ride about the wood half the day. It will be an hour and a half before a fox will break—even if he ever breaks.'

'Dear me! how tired you will be of us. Now do say something pretty, Mr. Staveley.'

'It's not my *métier*. We shall be tired, not of you, but of the thing. Galloping up and down the same cuts in the wood for an hour and a half is not exciting; nor does it improve the matter much if we stand still, as one should do by rights.'

'That would be very slow.'

'You need not be afraid. They never do here. Everybody will be rushing about as though the very world depended on their galloping.'

'I'm so glad; that's just what I like.'

'Everybody except Lord Alston, Miss Tristram, and the other old stagers. They will husband their horses, and come out as fresh at two o'clock as though they were only just out. There is nothing so valuable as experience in hunting.'

'Do you think it nice seeing a young lady with so much hunting knowledge?'

'Now you want me to talk slander, but I won't do it. I admire the Miss Tristrams exceedingly, and especially Julia.'

'And which is Julia?'

'The youngest; that one riding by herself.'

'And why don't you go and express your admiration?'

'Ah, me! why don't we all express the admiration that we feel, and pour sweet praises into the ears of the lady that excites it? Because we are cowards, Miss Furnival, and are afraid even of such a weak thing as a woman.'

'Dear me! I should hardly have thought that you would suffer from such terror as that.'

'Because you don't quite know me, Miss Furnival.'

'And Miss Julia Tristram is the lady that has excited it?'

'If it be not she, it is some other fair votary of Diana at present riding into Monkton Wood.'

'Ah, now you are giving me a riddle to guess, and I never guess riddles. I won't even try at it. But they all seem to be stopping.'

'Yes, they are putting the hounds into covert. Now if you want to show yourself a good sportsman, look at your watch. You see that Julia Tristram has got hers in her hand.'

'What's that for?'

'To time the hounds; to see how long they'll be before they find. It's very pretty work in a small gorse, but in a great wood like this I don't care much for being so accurate. But for heaven's sake don't tell Julia Tristram; I should not have a chance if she thought I was so slack.'

And now the hounds were scattering themselves in the wood, and the party rode up the centre roadway towards a great circular opening in the middle of it. Here it was the recognized practice of the horsemen to stand, and those who properly did their duty would stand there; but very many lingered at the gate, knowing that there was but one other exit from the wood, without overcoming the difficulty of a very intricate and dangerous fence.

'There be a gap, baint there?' said one farmer to another, as they were entering.

'Yes, there be a gap, and young Grubbles broke his 'orse's back a getting over of it last year,' said the second farmer.

'Did he though?' said the first; and so they both remained at the gate.

And others, a numerous body, including most of the ladies, galloped up and down the cross ways, because the master of the hounds and the huntsman did so. 'D—— those fellows riding up and down after me wherever I go,' said the master. 'I believe they think I'm to be hunted.' This seemed to be said more espe-

cially to Miss Tristram, who was always in the master's confidence; and I fear that the fellows alluded to included Miss Furnival and Miss Staveley.

And then there came the sharp, eager sound of a hound's voice; a single, sharp, happy opening bark, and Harriet Tristram was the first to declare that the game was found. 'Just five minutes and twenty seconds, my lord,' said Julia Tristram to Lord Alston. 'That's not bad in a large wood like this.'

'Uncommonly good,' said his lordship. 'And when are we to get out of it?'

'They'll be here for the next hour, I'm afraid,' said the lady, not moving her horse from the place where she stood, though many of the more impetuous of the men were already rushing away to the gates. 'I have seen a fox go away from here without resting a minute; but that was later in the season, at the end of February. Foxes are away from home then.' All which observations showed a wonderfully acute sporting observation on the part of Miss Tristram.

And then the music of the dogs became fast and frequent, as they drove the brute across and along from one part of the large wood to another. Sure there is no sound like it for filling a man's heart with an eager desire to be at work. What may be the trumpet in battle I do not know, but I can imagine that it has the same effect. And now a few of them were standing on that wide circular piece of grass, when a sound the most exciting of them all reached their ears. 'He's away!' shouted a whip from a corner of the wood. The goodnatured beast, though as yet it was hardly past Christmas-time, had consented to bless at once so many anxious sportsmen, and had left the back of the covert with the full pack at his heels.

'There is no gate that way, Miss Tristram,' said a gentleman.

'There's a double ditch and bank that will do as well,' said she, and away she went directly after the hounds, regardless altogether of the gates. Peregrine Orme and Felix Graham, who were with her, followed close upon her track.

BY HER MAJESTY'S LETTERS PATENT

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RIMMEL'S PATENT PERFUME VAPORIZER.

The means employed hitherto for perfuming the atmosphere have been to burn aromatic resins or woods under the shape of pastilles, papers, ribbons, &c., which all emit the same heavy smell, unpleasant to most persons, and even injurious to some. A lamp, with a platina wire and ball, was introduced a few years since, for a like purpose, but it gave out very little perfume, and that little was mixed with noxious acrid vapors disengaged during the operation. RIMMEL'S PERFUME VAPORIZER is intended to replace those defective processes by the simple emanations of flowers produced through the agency of steam, or what may be termed an open-air distillation. The various points of superiority offered by this Apparatus, may be thus briefly summed up.

I.—It diffuses the perfume of any flower in all its freshness and purity, emitting the balmy fragrance of a blooming parterre, on a fine spring morning.

II.—The vapors produced are so delicate and refreshing that they cannot affect even the most nervous persons, and their elasticity is such that they spread over a vast area in a very short time. Fifteen minutes are sufficient to perfume the largest theatre, and a small room naturally requires much less.

III.—This process entirely neutralizes the vitiated air generated in theatres, ball-rooms, and other assemblies; used on the dinner or supper table, at dessert time it replaces the unpleasant culinary odours by a grateful and reviving fragrance. It also completely removes the smell of tobacco.

IV.—It effectually purifies the air in dwelling-houses, and counteracts unpleasant and noxious effluvia arising from drains, gas, or any other cause.

V.—It is invaluable for the sick chamber, substituting balmy and soothing vapors to the close and tainted atmosphere, and leaving the patient the gratification of choosing his own favorite flower or scent.

VI.—It is strongly recommended to travellers, especially to those visiting continental cities, where such a pleasant and powerful disinfectant will often prove a great desideratum. It will also be found very reviving at sea to fumigate close cabins.

VII.—This Apparatus forms an elegant drawing-room ornament, is easily managed, requires no trouble nor labour, cannot get out of repair, and is sold at a very moderate price which places it within the reach of all classes.

In order to give the public a full guarantee of the useful and beneficial properties of his PERFUME VAPORIZER, E. RIMMEL has submitted it to the most eminent authorities on all sanitory matters, whose favorable opinion confirms in every point the foregoing observations, and leads E. R. to hope that his invention will be extensively patronized as soon as it becomes known.

N.B.—The Vaporizer can only be used with the Perfumes prepared specially by E. RIMMEL, as other Perfumes would not produce the desired effect, and there would be danger of ignition.

TESTIMONIALS.

COLLEGE LABORATORY, LONDON HOSPITAL,
March 9th, 1861.

The Apparatus which Mr. RIMMEL has invented for diffusing the scent of flowers and other perfumes into the atmosphere is a great improvement on the usual contrivances for volatilizing aromatic substances by the aid of a dry heat, or by slow combustion; for in all such cases many imperfectly oxydised compounds are produced, which not only destroy the delicacy of the perfume, but which by reason of their acridity give an irritating property to the air. This is not so with the Apparatus of Mr. RIMMEL, which acts at too low a temperature for combustion, and which by evolving aqueous vapour diffuses the most delicate scents without injury to their odour. This, indeed, is the speciality of the invention, and I have no doubt that it will be found useful, not merely as a refinement and luxury in ordinary rooms, but as a corrective of the atmosphere of sick chambers, for there are good grounds for the opinion that many perfumes are endowed with the power of ozonizing the air and so of giving it a disinfecting property. The Apparatus might also be employed as a means of volatilizing medicinal substances, and thus acting as a curative agent. Lastly, its use in Theatres, Club-houses, Dining Saloons, and such other places of public resort, will doubtless be fully appreciated.

H. LETHEBY, M.B., Ph.D. & C.,
Professor of Chemistry in the College of the London Hospital and Medical Officer of Health for the City of London.

Dr. HASSALL, Dr. GOLDSBORO', and Mr. CANTON, Surgeon to the Charing Cross Hospital, have all expressed their high opinion of the merits of the Vaporizer; the latter has introduced it into the wards of the Hospital and been much satisfied with the results.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"A simple apparatus capable of being made very useful as a sanitory agent, as well as for the diffusion of merely pleasant odours through apartments, hospitals, halls, theatres, &c."—*Builder.*

"We are fully convinced that this simple but ingenious contrivance will be most extensively adopted and patronised so soon as it becomes more generally known, for it combines useful with agreeable properties and hence may truly be termed *utile dulci*."—*Technologist.*

"We understand Mr. Rimmel is preparing a series of Perfume Vaporizers for private use, which, on account of the many useful purposes for which they are adapted, will assuredly meet with great success."—*Morning Post.*

"This is a charming improvement on the old fashioned pastille."—*China Telegraph.*

"Mr. Rimmel's art has been taxed to diffuse by means of his new patent the most delightful scents into the hall during the progress of the entertainment."—*Lady's Newspaper.*

"Mr. Rimmel, the eminent Perfumer, diffuses the perfume of sweet briar through the hall by a singularly effective process of his own invention."—*Morning Star.*

"The grand *bal masqué* given at Her Majesty's Theatre last Monday, afforded another opportunity of testing the merits of 'Rimmel's Perfume Vaporizer,' which seemed to neutralize completely the vitiated air inherent to such assemblies, and replace it with a refreshing atmosphere of 'sweet smells.'"—*United Service Gazette.*

"The very breath of a thousand flowers is wafted into the hall by Rimmel's new patent process."—*Court Circular.*

"It is a very graceful invention."—*New York Weekly Programme.*

"Mr. Rimmel, the perfumer, has recently invented a small apparatus termed the 'Perfume Vaporizer,' for diffusing a grateful vapour in crowded assemblies or private dwellings, which effectually destroys unpleasant effluvia. It appears to be well adapted for those who travel by sea, to fumigate close cabins and to dispel other *desagremens* on shipboard. The invention is deserving of some commendation, and is presented in an elegant and economical form."—*Australian and New Zealand Gazette.*

"No one having used 'Rimmel's Perfume Vaporizer' would consider his house furnished without it."—*Atlas.*



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